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SONGS OF WEDLOCK

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SONGS OF WEDLOCK

BY
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"CANZONI" AND "MADRIGALI"



PHILADELPHIA
DAVID M^cKAY
604-608 South Washington Square
1916

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TO N. B. D.

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THE PERFECT SOLITUDE

WHEN, sick at heart and weary of my kind
And of the day-long traffic, I would find

The peace and healing touch of solitude,
I envy no lone eremite who stands,
Sealed up with silence on the desert sands,

Where never murmurs of the world intrude.
I know a sweeter place, a holier bower
For the enshrining of the quiet hour.

Mine is a solitude that two may share,
A lamp-lit table, with an easy chair

At either end, a friendly book for each,
And—save for clock-ticks pulsing in the room—
Sweet silence; but a silence that may bloom,

At her will or at mine, to loving speech.
This is the dearest place, the holiest bower
For the enshrining of the quiet hour.

WHEN DAY BEGINS

WHEN doth the light of day begin,
And what far gates first let it in?
The calm deep blue of morning skies
Doth greet me earliest from your eyes;
My first warm glint of sunlight flashes
Across the soft gold of your lashes;
And the first breath of day that thrills
'Twixt dawn-flushed sky and waking hills,
O'er pure mid-ocean's foam-flecked reaches,
O'er spume-swept rocks and silvern beaches,
To the near fields whose chaliced blooms
Catch and distill the winds' perfumes
To honey-dew that wild bees sip,
 Is not so pure,
 So quick, so sure
As the warm kiss upon your lip—
The golden kiss which is the key
That opes the day for me.

TO A THRUSH

SING clear, O! throstle,
Thou golden-tongued apostle
And little brown-frocked brother
Of the loved Assisian!
Sing courage to the mother,
Sing strength into the man,
For they, who in another May
Trode Hope's scant wine from grapes of pain,
Have tasted in thy song to-day
The bitter-sweet red lees again.
To them in whose sad May-time thou
Sang'st comfort from thy maple bough,
To tinge the presaged dole with sweet,
O! prophet then, be prophet now
And paraclete!

That fateful May! The pregnant vernal night
Was throbbing with the first faint pangs of day,
The while with ordered urge toward life and light,
Earth-atoms countless groped their destined way;
And one full-winged to fret
Its tender oubliette,
The warding mother-heart above it woke.
Darkling she lay in doubt, then, sudden wise,
Whispered her husband's drowsy ear and broke
The estranging seal of slumber from his eyes:
"My hour is nigh: arise!"

TO A THRUSH

Already, when, with arms for comfort linked,
The lovers at an eastward window stood,
The rosy day, in cloudy swaddlings, blinked
Through misty green new-fledged in Wister Wood.
Breathless, upon this birth
The still-entranced earth
Seemed brooding, motionless in windless space.
Then rose thy priestly chant, O! holy bird!
And heaven and earth were quickened with its grace;
To tears two wedded souls were moved who heard,
And one, unborn, was stirred!

O! Comforter, enough that from thy green
Hid tabernacle in the wood's recess
To those care-haunted lovers thou, unseen,
Shouldst send thy flame-tipped song to cheer and bless.
Enough for them to hear
And feel thy presence near;
And yet when he, regardful of her ease,
Had led her back by brightening hall and stair
To her own chamber's quietude and peace,
One maple-bowered window shook with rare,
Sweet song—and thou wert there!

TO A THRUSH

Hunter of souls! the loving chase so nigh
Those spirits twain had never come before.
They saw the sacred flame within thine eye;
To them the maple's depths quick glory wore,
As though God's hand had lit
His altar fire in it,
And made a fane, of virgin verdure pleached,
Wherefrom thou might'st in numbers musical
Expound the age-sweet words thy Francis preached
To thee and thine, of God's benignant thrall
That broodeth over all.

And they, athirst for comfort, sipped thy song,
But drank not yet thy deeper homily.
Not yet, but when parturient pangs grew strong,
And from its cell the young soul struggled free—
A new joy, trailing grief,
A little crumpled leaf,
Blighted before it bourgeoned from the stem—
Thou, as the fabled robin to the rood,
Wert minister of charity to them;
And from the shadows of sad parenthood
They heard and understood.

TO A THRUSH

Makes God one soul a lure for snaring three?
Ah! surely; so this nursling of the nest,
This teen-touched joy, ere birth anoint of thee,
Yet bears thy chrismal music in her breast.
Five Mays have come and sped
Above her sunny head,
And still the happy song abides in her.
For though on maimèd limbs the body creeps,
It doth a spirit house whose pinions stir
Familiarly the far cerulean steeps
Where God His mansion keeps.

So come, O! throstle,
Thou golden-tongued apostle
And little brown-frosted brother
Of the loved Assisian!
Sing courage to the mother,
Sing strength into the man,
That she who in another May
Came out of heaven, trailing care,
May never know that sometimes gray
Earth's roof is and its cupboards bare.
To them in whose sad May-time thou
Sang'st comfort from thy maple bough,
To tinge the presaged dole with sweet,
O! prophet then, be prophet now
And paraclete!

THE JOURNEY

You are so brave, so loyal and so true!

You bring such sunshine to the last farewell
When some far duty calls me forth from you,
What fears consume your heart I cannot tell;
Not mine to know what prayers or teardrops pour
From your pent heart, when you have closed
the door.

But this I know: How long, how far I roam,
My honor and my babes are safe with you
And light and sweetness shall illumine our home;
You are so brave, so true!

You are so brave, so loyal and so true,
I should be worse than craven did I fail
To make the last long kiss I had from you
My knightly sword and shield and triple mail.
You cannot see, through leagues of space that part,
If passion or if peace be in my heart,
But this believe: How long, how far I roam,
Whate'er my mind may plan or hands may do,
I would be worthy to be welcomed home
By you, so brave, so true!

IN WINTRY WEATHER

WHAT was the impulse wild that led us forth
That boist'rous night,
When to the gusty wooing of the North
The world lay white,
And trees in icy mail
Gave battle to the gale
That armed them so?
What spell impelled us, dear,
To quit our ingle's cheer
To frolic in the snow?

O! Youth! O! wild, sweet fire
That burnest brighter, higher,
With strong and pure desire
At touch of wintry weather,
With equal flame inspire
My love and me together!

What of the pale, gray years that are to come
Upon us twain?
When nights tempestuous then rage 'round
our home
Will we be fain
To pluck with fingers chill
From Winter's heart the thrill
That now we know?
Shall either care, my dear,
To quit our ingle's cheer
To frolic in the snow?

IN WINTRY WEATHER

O! Age, when Youth is over,
And we, old wife and lover,
About this hearthstone hover
 In wild and wintry weather,
With peaceful mem'ries cover
 My love and me together!

INSCRIPTION FOR A FIREPLACE

I'M Home's heart! Warmth I give and light,
If you but feed me.
I blossom in the winter night,
When most you need me.

To melt your cares, to warm your guest,
My cheer's supplied you;
But, O! to know me at my best,
Hold Her beside you!

THE MOTHER

SHE was so frail, my little one,
She had not yet begun to stir
Her tiny limbs; from sun to sun,
This breast, these arms maternal were
The bounded universe for her.

But now far spaces feel her might,
And sad, sweet thoughts of her arise
With every sun; she stirs the night
With sighing winds, and from the skies
She looks at me with starry eyes.

A SONG FOR JANUARY

A NEW door opens to the fresh, sweet air,
And one swings shut behind us.
Time still is ours! but in the darkness there
We've left a little joy, a little care,
Whose ghosts alone go with us to remind us.
How transitory pleasure is and pain,
How brief may be our faring ere we gain
One quiet nook—our own for evermore—
And next year may not find us
With eager feet before its opening door
When this swings shut behind us.

But cheer! Sing cheer
To the glad New Year!
Come, blend your voice in the chorus!
Ho! what care we
Where the shut doors be?
Here's an opening door before us!

INSPIRATION

“GOOD NIGHT,” and then your candle’s feeble flare
Went glimmering up the stair;

A door closed and the house was still,
Slow, hour by hour, the night grew old,
And from the smouldering hearth the cold

Stole forth and laid its chill
On fingers weary of the pen,
On heart and brain that had been fain
To make a song of cheer.

For, oh, the summer warm and bright
You conjured in the winter night
Went upward with your candlelight,
Went with you up the stair.

THE SANCTUM

LORD, God of love, the wedded heart's
Sure Comforter,
O! make mine pure in all its parts,
For Thee and Her!
Pour, Lord, the flood-tide of Thy grace
Through all its chambers, and efface
Each secret thought's abiding place.
I pray Thee make
One shrine of it, which Thou and she
May jointly share, that it may be
Open to her, Lord, as to Thee,
For her dear sake.

Lord, God of love, who givest me
Her heart of fire,
Long keep it mine, but let it be
Not mine entire.
Though mine the honeyed tenderness,
That wells therein to cheer and bless
When joys elate or cares depress,
I pray Thee make
Thy secret shrine within its core.
Let me before one close-sealed door
Cry "Non sum dignus" o'er and o'er
For her dear sake.

MAY walks the earth again,
This old earth, and the same
Green spurts of tender flame
Burn now on sod and tree
That burned when first she came,
Dear love, to you and me.
If any change there be—
A greater or a less
Degree of loveliness—
It is not ours to see,
Dear love,
Not ours to feel or see.

May thrills our hearts again,
These old hearts, and the bough
Burns not with blossoms now
That blow more splendidly.
For, since our wedded vow
Made one of you and me,
If any change there be—
A greater or a less
Degree of tenderness—
It is not ours to see,
Dear love,
Not ours to feel or see.

CARES of the day, like a peddler's pack,
Tawdry and profitless, weighing me down,
Burdened my brain and my bended back
As I turned to you out of the town.
Listlessly, slowly, my laggard feet,
Timed to the torpor of heart and brain,
Brought me at length to the quiet street
With the home-light warm at the pane.
Then I shook my cares from their lingering hold
And I laid them there in the outer cold
Till the workaday morrow to rest,
For these were things for the teeming mart,
And not for your gentle breast, dear heart,
Oh! not for your gentle breast.

Wearing a smile that my heart belied,
Over the threshold I passed to you.
What was the charm of our ingleside,
Where we dreamed our old dreams anew?
What was the spell of delight we wove
Out of soft laughter and song and jest?
Glamor of youth and the old, old love
And the peace, of your quiet breast.
And, behold! when the day is come once more,
And I shoulder my cares at the outer door,
What miracle sweet is this?
All the burden I bear to the teeming mart
Is light and sweet as your kiss, dear heart,
Oh! sweet as your fragrant kiss.

HER MUSIC

THY soul was in thy fingers when they strayed
Among the keys, at twilight hour to-night;
Then, winging with the melody they made,
It soared, by mine companioned, to the height
Where holy Melancholy sat, arrayed
One length in gloom and one all golden bright. * * *
Thy soul, returning, brought but shreds of shade;
Mine filched the golden light.

Then, when I smiled and would not match thy mood
With solemn speech, thou sought'st thy lonely bed.
But that was hours ago, and thou hast wooed
Forgetfulness with tears so softly shed.
But I! How swift this June-night solitude
Hath poured prophetic sorrow on my head.
Here is my soul stripped bare, Promethean food
For one sharp-taloned dread.

Death is a wholesome thing for inward thought,
But not for mutual speech, dear heart.
Oh! long may Azrael leave us twain unsought;
But when he comes, I pray, not thine the part,
Lorn lingerer in years with sadness fraught,
To scent new-broken earth with such a start
And pang of loss as June's sweet breezes brought
To me to-night, dear heart.

THE CITADEL

IN dust of petty war
My plume to-day was trailed:
With barbs that pricked me sore
My enemy assailed,
And for the nonce prevailed.
'Twas *his* day, I admit.
But now the west has paled
And here's an end of it.

My enemy—the fool!—
Believes me beaten well.
With boasts and ridicule
His conquest let him tell;
But when the shadows fell
I rose up and withdrew
To this my citadel—
The quiet night and you!

Another day awaits
Beyond the orient rim;
But, ere it opes its gates,
Your love shall mend my vim;
One day's defeat shall dim
Your faith in me no whit.
This day belonged to him,
But here's an end of it.

THE CITADEL

How fatuous this foe,
Who wars in street and mart
And hopes to lay me low,
Yet hath no venom'd dart,
Howe'er it bite and smart,
To strike his hate unto
This stronghold of my heart—
The quiet night and you!

A SONG FOR AUGUST

HERE's the year on the wane.
There are signs in the sky,
In the woods, on the plain,
That its noon has gone by.
But the harvest's to gain
And the cool nights are nigh,
When the year's on the wane.

Here's the year on the wane.
There's a hawk in the blue;
In the wheat a red stain
Where the poppy peeps through.
But there's bread in the grain
And there's warmth o' love, too,
When the year's on the wane.

Here's the year on the wane.
From the night-shrouded hill,
Comes the katydid's strain,
And the wind's whistle shrill.
But two hearts may contain
All the spring's music still,
When the year's on the wane.

LOVE IS ETERNAL

Love is eternal. It never can die.

Though we lull it with laughter or drug it with sorrow,
Not the primeval sea, not the sun in the sky,

Not the reaches of space are so sure of a morrow.
As the waters of ocean in vapor ascending,
Then in rain-nourished streams through the green valleys
wending

Have the ocean again for their ultimate winning,
Shall not Love, through all changes, move on to its ending
In the bosom of God, whence it had its beginning?

Love is immortal. It is not of earth.

Though ill fortune retard it, dear, what does it matter?
Shall a harvest of roses be deemed of no worth

When the taint of each canker is purged in the attar?
If earth's waters are purest through heaven's refining,
Shall the ills of this world chill our love with repining?

Here we sow, but not here reap the meed of endeavor,
For the fruits of our love, past all human divining,
In the bosom of God we shall harvest forever.

THE QUEEN'S FLEETS

TAKE for thy throne, my queen, this niche my hand
Hath carved for thee,
Here in the gray breast of this dune of sand
That fronts the sea.
In sovereign state aloof, the solitude
Hedging thee round, as once thy maidenhood,
Make me no partner of thy thought or speech
This hour when day and darkness meet,
But count me merely jetsam of the beach,
Here at thy feet.

It is mute beauty's hour. No late bird sings;
Voiceless, serene,
The sea dreams; Silence holds all lovely things—
And thou art queen!
For Silence, in the twilight's gold and red
Behind thee, sets a crown upon thy head.
Send forth, O Queen, thy fleets upon the main,
Send forth thy daring fleets of thought,
And let me wait to hail them home again
With riches fraught.

THE QUEEN'S FLEETS

By Fancy captained, send thy fleets afar
To win the sea;
Send them to know what spoils in ocean are,
What mystery,
What beauty in all things that "suffered change"
In coral caves to "something rich and strange."
Then bring them home and I with kingly might
Will take their treasure, as it lies
Safe-harbored in the starlit, purple night
Of thy dear eyes.

THE LIVING-ROOM

HERE throbs the home's deep heart!
From these four walls the full, warm spirits start,
Pulse through the halls, return, and richest bloom
In this small room.
For all who gather here when day is done,
But, most of all, for her, the central One,
 Whose great love to the whole doth warmth impart,
As to the lesser planets doth the Sun,
 Here throbs the home's deep heart.

This is a Queen's domain,
And all her subjects, happy in her reign,
Pray God she may, with her sweet woman's grace,
Long bless this place.
This is her court. The little airs that stir
About the room are eloquent of her.
 Each senseless thing whereon her hand hath lain
Becomes in its own way a courtier.
 This is a Queen's domain!

This is a holy spot.
Ah! pity for the man who knows it not!
But peace and holy calm, the light o' love
Knows nothing of,
The Queen's mate hath, when in the quiet night
He broods alone beside his ingle's light.
 He knows, when all his heart burns pure and hot
With thoughts too sweet to speak aloud or write,
 This is a holy spot!

A SONG FOR NOVEMBER

A GRAY old hag, in cloak and hood
Of sombre gray,
Gleaning gray twigs and bits of wood
At close of day,
November creeps across the land.
Yet magic gifts are in her hand—
Her fagots cold need but a spark
And hearth-stone room,
And warmth of June from out the dark
Will burst to bloom.

Of foster-mothers tenderest,
Close-harboring
Earth's sleeping seeds within her breast
Until the spring,
Let gray November clasp the land.
Yet from her lean but kindly hand
Let us, dear heart, her fagots take,
And on this stone
A warm and cheery June-time make;
Our own, our own!

YE are the dullards, and not I,
Ye conscienceless philanderers!
From one love to the next ye fly
And are forever wanderers.
O! poor, blind votaries of the chase,
Ye deem me coldly dutiful
Who, steadfast, watch one love-lit face
Grow year by year more beautiful!

Each new love lives in your desire
For but a moment's cherishing;
Your passion is a smouldering fire
That is forever perishing,
That, seeking change, hath only found
The ashes of satiety—
While mine hath but begun to sound
Its one love's sweet variety!

THE GATES OF PARADISE

THE gates of Paradise are double,
And they are blue;
Blue as the skies when no clouds trouble
Their perfect hue;
Blue as the calm face of the ocean
When winds are still,
And sunlight only is in motion
To work its will.
When skies are dull, the sea is lonely
And moans or sleeps;
The quick winds or the warm sun only
May stir its deeps.

The gates of Paradise are double,
And they are blue;
They ope to love, but cold, gray trouble
Will clang them to.
Lord, give me strength that I who love them
May live aright,
And spread no tristful clouds above them
To dim their light.
By other paths may other mortals
Win Paradise,
But keep for me its clearest portals
In her pure eyes.

JUNE is sweet, for then I found thee;
But November, gray and cold,
Weaves warm memories around thee,
Spun of gold.

June a rose-time we remember,
Ere the boy became the man;
But in earnest with November
Life began.

Still I see thee, as we threaded
Gray woods under grayer skies;
Strange new hopes and fears were wedded
In thine eyes.

And when these had been translated
Into awed and reverent speech,
Stronglier then our souls were mated
Each with each.

Deep with vernal promise laden,
As with buds the leafless wood,
Here was blossoming of the maiden—
Womanhood.

Rich the memories now that hover
'Round that day when Life began,
And the lightheart boy, thy lover,
Was a man.

AT THE OPERA

MUSIC that throbs with passion and with pain
Hath power to touch me only in so far
As intimate, dear memories live again
In the remembered twinkling of a star,
Or moonlight sleeping on a summer plain,
Or seaward waters on the flooded bar;
For all that once hath known
Your bared soul and mine own
Still know us as we are.

So if, dear love, in this enchanted place
My ears were deaf to all melodious sound,
But still my eyes could brood upon your face,
Where music holds your soul in gentle swound,
We should be one, for there my eyes would trace
All joys wherein our mutual love was found;
And from your 'raptured soul
The melody would roll
To compass mine around.

THE MAN'S PRAYER

WHEN all is still within these walls,
And Thy sweet sleep through darkness falls
On little hearts that trust in me,
However bitter toil may be,
For length of days, O Lord! on Thee,
My spirit calls.

Their daily need by day enthralls
My hand and brain, but when night falls
And leaves the questioning spirit free
To brood upon the days to be,
For time and strength, O Lord! on Thee
My spirit calls.

THE TRUE VISION

PEACE, modest lady, 'tis too much
That in and out of season
You put my loving to the touch
And test of icy reason.
Why urge that much I see is due
To "auto-necromancy,"
That only part of you is you,
The rest my foolish fancy?

Peace, gentle lady, why protest
That love hath dulled my vision?
Can you believe that vision best
Which boasts of cold precision?
Oh! rather bless my truer eye—
Whatever flaws it *can't* see—
That knows your sweet reality,
Yet holds you still my fancy.

A SONG FOR DECEMBER

AUTUMN's fruits are gathered in
And the birds have taken wing,
What of pleasure's left to win
After song and harvesting?
Winter hath its own delight,
Garnering in fields of snow
Berries red and berries white—
Holly and the mistletoe!

So come, come along!
Winter's winds shall swell our song,
While with shouts and merry din
Comes the Yuletide harvest in!

Age hath reaped its youth and prime
And the blood stirs cold and thin,
What for Age hath winter-time?
What of pleasure's left to win?
Harvests still of rare delight,
Joys that once it used to know;
Berries red and berries white—
Holly and the mistletoe!

Come, Age, come and sit
Where the cheery hearth is lit,
While the young with merry din
Drag the Yuletide harvest in!

IN KINDRED KEYS

How fared the fight with thee to-day?
Not well? Ah, nay,
Thou hast not lost; thou can'st not lose,
However much they tear and bruise
The panting breast, the straining thews
Which are thy spirit's citadel,
If thou and Faith, upon the walls,
Are comrades still when darkness falls.
Rest now! In sleep thy veins shall swell
With Hope's new wine; and like a bell
From valleys deep heard on the height,
Thy 'leagured soul, throughout the night,
Shall call to thee: "All's well!"

It is thyself alone that may
Thyself betray.
Arise again! Arise and fight!
God's smile is in the morning light;
Lift thou thy banner brave and bright
Above thy spirit's citadel!
What matter if its fall be sure?
The pilgrim soul thy walls immure,
Clinging the wings of Azrael,
In face of all the hordes of hell,
Shall take, full-armed, its homeward flight,
And o'er thy ruins, from the height,
Shall call to thee: "All's well!"

TO A VIOLINIST

APPLAUSE! A rapturous burst
Spreads downward from the gods, who see you first
As you come bouncing in,
A little fat, unconscious harlequin. * * *
Clutching your fiddle in your hand,
Now in midstage you stand,
Bobbing and bowing, stiffly, jerkily,
To left, to right, to left.
And never for a moment still,
We, in the stalls, we smile to see
How droll you look; and even when your deft,
Quick fingers rouse the charm'd strings to your will,
The laughter, lurking in our lashes still,
Beats back the elfin voices at our ears.

How like a boat your violin appears
As, under lowered lids, our listless eyes
Watch its alternate rise and fall and rise,
Where, as the music sways, it seems to be
Tossed by the tempests on a fairy sea. * * *
And this strange sense, this sense of finer air
That, like a tide at flood, is everywhere,
Bearing up from depths unfathomed voices long imprisoned
there,
Voices of the singing birds that flattered unto happy tears
Lovers lingering in the twilights of how many thousand
years!
Voices moaning and intoning of old sorrows, hopes and fears!

TO A VIOLINIST

Sounds of waves on craggy beaches and of winds that shout
above,
Melting, dwindle to a murmur, like the cooing of the dove,
Rise again and, waxing stronger, swell into a chant of love.
Round and round the waves of music sweep through this en-
chanted place,
Catch the souls come forth to listen, trembling on each
hearer's face,
Draw them on and whirl them swiftly, lightly through the
fields of space,
Till the music and its maker and the hearers are as one—
And the masterwork is done!

Applause, spontaneous, springs,
Pursues you to the wings
And hales you out once more.
Encore! Encore! Encore!
Come back and bow, bow, bow—
You are not comic now.

TO THE CITY UNBEAUTIFUL

THEY are gone! O! implacable City,
 'Twixt a night and a night,
With no pang of regret or of pity,
 You have slain them outright.
Though their beauty besought you to spare it,
To keep it forever and wear it
 For your own and your children's delight,
You have fattened your greed and you merit
The squalor your streets shall inherit.

In their innocent glory and grace,
They, the primeval lords of the place,
Ere your earliest highway was trod,
Had grown old in the service of God;
And with arms lifted up, as in prayer,
Gave Him thanks for the sunlight and air,
For the nourishing moss at their feet;
And the thrushes that made their retreat
In the heart of this Eden so long,
For their lodging gave tribute of song.
E'en the violets, dotting the sward,
Breathing perfume of prayer to the Lord,
Paid in full for their leasehold; but you—
In the service of Mammon, you grew
To a huddle of houses and mills,
Spreading squalor through hollows and hills,
Till your grimy arms reached through your
 smoke
To this grove of the Poplar and Oak.

TO THE CITY UNBEAUTIFUL

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 'Twixt a night and a night,
With no pang of regret or of pity,
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 For your own and your children's delight,
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A SONG FOR FEBRUARY

FEBRUARY!
Chilly, chary
Of the vistas visionary
Through savannas blue and airy,
Where the fancy seeks to see
Promise of the days to be
Little sun and little blue
Pierce your dull, gray mantle through;
Saddest of our months are you,
February.

Out upon you! We will sing
To another, kindlier thing,
Hoping that our song may bring
Some returning, flashing wing
Which is augural of spring
To the heavens' brightening arch.
Come, then, forward from the South
Birds with music in the mouth!
Forward! all ye sleeping seeds,
Forward! brooks among your reeds,
Violets and eglantine,
Forward! all along the line,
March!

THE BIRTH-MONTH

IN the merry month of May,
 Gemini, my stars, are swinging
Midmost in the great sun's way;
 And the marching planets, bringing
Once again my natal day,
 Strangely stir my heart to singing
In the merry month of May.

In the merry month of May,
 Life and all it holds is dearer;
Be the zenith blue or gray—
 Possibly my vision's clearer
Now than ever, who shall say?—
 Heaven, to me, seems surer, nearer,
In the merry month of May.

In the merry month of May,
 Closer than my birth-stars, o'er me
Broods a spirit, bright as they;
 Spirit potent to restore me,
Blessing still my natal day—
 She, the sainted one who bore me
In the merry month of May!

A SONG FOR JUNE

OUR purse, my dear, is flat
(It never yet was fat),
Our garments worn and sere
(They were the same last year),
And frugally we dine
(Who never craved for wine).
Admitting that,
O! why, my dear,
Repine?
The merry world's in tune,
And fruits and flowers thrive
And robins sing, like mad:
"Ho! it is June,
And we're alive;
Be glad!"
Here are we, still together
(And richer by the weather);
There's nothing we would borrow
(O! certainly not sorrow),
But just what Heaven lends us
(This blue sky that attends us).
Why care a feather
What the morrow
Sends us?
This golden afternoon
Bees buzz about the hive
And robins sing, like mad:
"Ho! it is June,
And we're alive;
Be glad!"

THE VETERAN MARCHING ALONE

WHEN the Post turns out to-morrow
To honor our martial dead,
Let them count me among the absent,
Let them reckon me ill in bed;
Yet gallant shall be my marching
And holy the ground I tread.

I have vaunted too long my valor
And the valor of other men;
But the wisdom my years denied me—
My threescore years and ten—
The dream of a night has supplied me:
I never shall march again!

For this was the sleep-wrought vision
That came to me in my bed:
I was dead; I had passed in battle
And my warrior-soul had fled
To the field of the last great muster,
The bivouac of the dead.

I was one of the countless millions,
The heroes of many lands;
Pale spirits who stood in silence
Awaiting the Lord's commands,
The vanquished like to the victors
With drooping palms in their hands.

THE VETERAN MARCHING ALONE

Then a great voice swept above us,
And it winnowed us like a wind,
Crying: "Ye who have suffered in battle
And given to help your kind,
Ye shall find the greater before ye
And the lesser givers behind!"

Then I looked behind and about me
And rejoiced that my rank was good,
Far back as my gaze could fathom
Was a knightly brotherhood;
Then I turned to the ranks before me,
Where the greatest of givers stood.

And lo! where the clouds of glory
Encompassed the God of War,
There were numberless legions of women
All standing His throne before,
And each, in her wan arms lifted,
A living child upbore!

Then the palms in my hand were withered
And I wept in the dark, alone;
And I thought of a long-dead woman,
Whose giving outweighed my own,
And I thought of the grave that held her
Unmarked of flower or stone.

THE VETERAN MARCHING ALONE

When the Post turns out to-morrow
To honor our martial dead,
Let them count me among the absent,
Let them reckon me ill in bed;
Yet gallant shall be my marching
And holy the ground I tread.

THE BIRTH O' TAM O' SHANTER

[To a friendly challenge from Captain Grose we are indebted for this admirable masterpiece (*Tam o' Shanter*). Burns having entreated him to make honorable mention of Alloway Kirk in his *Antiquities of Scotland*, he promised compliance with the request upon condition that the poet should supply him with a metrical witch story as an accompaniment to the engraving. Mrs. Burns it was who related to Kromek the marvelous rapidity with which this poem was produced. According to her, it was the work of a single day, * * * as Alexander Smith puts it, with an exultant chuckle, the best day's work ever done in Scotland since Bruce won Bannockburn. Burns, during the early part of that memorable day, had passed the time alone in pacing his favorite walk upon the river bank. Thither in the afternoon he was followed by his "bonnie Jean" and some of their children. Finding that he was "crooning to himself," and fearing lest their presence might be an interruption, his considerate wife loitered some little distance behind among the bloom and heather with her brood of young ones. There her attention was caught by the poet's impassioned gesticulations. She could hear him repeating aloud, while the tears ran down his face: "Now, Tam! O, Tam! had they been queans." Toward evening, when the storm of composition had fairly run out, Burns, we are told by M'Diarmid, committed the verses to writing upon the top of a sod dyke, overhanging the river; and directly they were completed rushed indoors to read them aloud by the fireside in a tone of rapturous exultation.]-REV. DR. J. LOUGHRAN SCOTT, in the Alloway Edition of Burns' Works.

[Read before the Burns Club of St. Louis on January 25, 1916.]

How broke the east upon that day,
In fire and blood or ashes gray?
And did a rich or niggard boon
Of sunlight gild the Nith at noon?
Who knows or cares? For on that morning,
When Tam o' Shanter, without warning,
Came gloriously down to earth,
The river, singing at his birth,
Wore on its face a mystic light;
For in that moment reached its height
The lyric fire, the dying flare
From out the heart of Burns of Ayr!

O! little Nith! O! happy river,
You shall not lose that gleam forever;
Your waves, whatever moods betide them,
Shall sing of him who walked beside them
And from his great heart wove a story
That was the crown upon his glory.
And on that morning when he came
With frenzied eye and cheek aflame
To feast his soul upon the food
That poets find in solitude,
What was the charm you held him with,
O! helpful little river Nith?
Ah, well I know the way you did it!
I shall not mince nor gloss the credit,
But, auditing the dim dead past,
Shall here set down your score at last.

To you, that morning (Who shall care
If skies above were dull or fair?)
The poet, seeking comfort, brought
His fecund fancy, big with thought.
Beside your bonnie banks he walked,
And ever as he went he talked
The quaint, blithe things that thronged his brain
And conned them o'er and o'er again;
And presently the liquid laughter
Of pleasant waters gurgled after,
And, as a voice by harp attended,
With borrowed beauty grows more splendid,

THE BIRTH O' TAM O' SHANTER

So waxed the poet's budding song
Where light your ripples leaped along.
You smiled and danced and made your measures
To match his song of ale-house pleasures,
Where Tam and cronies came to mingle
Beside their comfortable ingle;
But when the "reaming swats" came thicker
And Robin's tongue, that sang of liquor,
Grew overloud and full of yearning,
No doubt you set your rapids churning,
To draw his thoughts from off the "nappy"
And keep him singing, blithe and happy.

Then, when he pushed those joys aside
And sallied forth with Tam to ride,
(For well you know that Tam o' Shanter
Was not alone upon that canter)
How well again his mood was fellowed!
Among your rocks the thunder bellowed;
Your spray upon the light breeze passed
For "rattlin' showers upon the blast";
You made the "Doon pour all his floods,"
The "doubling storm roar through the woods";
And somewhere in your shadows lurk
The dancers in the ruined kirk.

But when that dance grew wild and furious
And Tam, with watching, much too curious;
And Robin, prattling of the "queans,
A' plump and strapping in their teens,"
Seemed bent on lingering overlong,
I like to think that then the song
In all your rippling waves you stilled,
As by the breath of winter chilled,
That Robin, in the pause, might hear
His "bonnie Jean" and children near;
And draw his thoughts from "sarks o' flannel"
And back into the proper channel.

* * * * *

Then with your song and liquid laughter
You rose again to follow after,
With O! what sympathetic feeling,
Where faithful Meg, the mare, goes reeling
Across the bridge that spans the flood,
By all the ghostly crew pursued,
And carries off her master, hale,
But leaves behind her own grey tail.

And when the day was done you knew
The poet's exaltation, too;
'Twas yours at fall of dusk to share
The calm that soothed the Bard of Ayr,
And through the night, O happy stream!
You were a music in his dream.

There, musing by some mossy stone,
Perhaps, ah, yes, you must have known
That though again upon your shore
The poet still would walk, no more
Would Time bring round to you the bliss
Of any day to match with this—
The very cap-sheaf on the past,
The greatest labor and the last.

Oh! in the fire of that one day
How many years were burned away?
And in the torrents of his tears
Were lost how many unborn years?
For this man took life's cup and laughed
And strove to drain it at a draught.
What tragedy was in this mirth,
O! river, singing at its birth?
What holocaust was in the light
With which your morning face was bright?

O! little Nith! O! happy river,
You shall not lose that gleam forever;
Your waves, whatever moods betide them,
Shall sing of him who walked beside them
And from his great heart wove a story
That was the crown upon his glory!

O! HAVE ye seen Rogue Autumn?
He's hiding hereabout
To rob me of my green domain
And put my birds to rout.
He's marshaling his army;
The skirmishers are out.
"All's well! All's well!" the katydids,
His nightly pickets, shout.

Rogue Autumn, bold pretender,
Conspiring with the sun,
Is working in the morning mists
That I may be undone.
Already through my fields and woods
The fires of treason run;
My myriad leaves are putting on
His colors, one by one.

Thy breath at night, Rogue Autumn,
Strikes chill upon my brow;
My crown uneasy rests upon
The head I soon must bow.
Take thou thy spoil! But there will come
A mightier than thou,
Whose winds shall pierce and break thy heart,
As mine is breaking now!

THE scene: A public city square,
With crowded benches here and there.
The time: A drowsy afternoon,
Charged with the heady wine of June.
Chief actors: Voice, Law's voice, supreme
And harsh with petty power: and Dream,
A vagrant sprite that stops to play
'Round one old head unkempt and gray.

The Dream:

Ah! rest. How far off seems the street—
Its heat still tingles in my feet,
But Lord! how sweet this is, how sweet!—
And O! the shade, this blessed shade
That all the little leaves have made—
The little leaves—they're whispering now—
Whispering? They're singing on the bough!
How clear and sweet the whole tree sings—
Tree? It's a golden bird with wings!
How soft its back is! Sweet to lie
Snug in its feathers here and fly
Where Heaven is so wide and clear—

The Voice:

Hey! Set up straight; ye can't sleep here!

The Dream:

* * * The nurse-maid smiled,
But she looked kind; so did the child.
What dimpled cheeks! so round, so fair,
Like peaches. * * * Peaches, everywhere!
Wait, little boy, don't climb the trees.
See how the fruit swings in the breeze.
Lie here with me until they fall.
Here where the grass is thick and tall,
Stretch yourself out and lie at ease.
Don't shake! don't shake! don't shake the trees!
Here they come pelting down like rain—

The Voice:

Here, Bo! I warn ye onct again.

The Dream:

* * * * His coat is blue,
Yet Heaven has the self-same hue;
How odd! * * * His belt looks tight in back,
And mine—it never was so slack.
Somewhere, somewhere, there's bread and meat;
Somewhere, perhaps, but then the street—
If I could wet my face and hair
With water from that fountain there—
How sparkingly the ripples break,
And what a pleasant sound they make!
Drip! drip! * * * the mill-wheel turns so slow,
So slow, so slow—Ah! there's a fish!
He's in the net! Now for a dish
That any royal king might wish! * * *
O! peaceful pipe beside the fire—
The moon's up now and rising higher.
Snug is the camp, crisp-cool the night,
The embers flare up, warm and bright!
The waves of heat that beat, beat, beat,
Upon the weary, way-worn feet—

The Voice:

I warned you twice an' now you're done,
Git out o' here! Move on! move on!

THOSE few lines on the printed page
Call up for me a darkened stage. * * *
And Fancy in the shadowy wings
Paints ghosts of dear, once happy things—
Bright elves which in that place had birth
Of clear-eyed Truth and frolic Mirth,
And, having filled their hour of grace,
Now, mute, on tiptoe, haunt the place. * * *
Nor light nor any sound is there
To strike across the brooding air,
But still a sense above it all
Of something evil to befall. * * *
Then sounds, off-stage, one tap—no more—
As of a knuckle on a door,
And with the sound a gust upblows,
Chill as the breath of Arctic snows;
The grisly call-boy in the dark
Is waiting at the threshold. Hark!
He speaks! His tones sepulchral frame
The loved, but half-forgotten, name.
A brave, sweet voice makes answering hail,
And merging with it breaks a wail
Of sobbing in the upper air. * * *
A thin light stabs the dark—and there
A youth—nay, but the merest boy—
Who loved this Priestess of Pure Joy,
Leans from the gallery and peers
Down, stageward, through a mist of tears. * * *

The weeping stops; the last faint note
Chokes back into my aching throat,
For in this boyish mourner see
The lad that once I used to be. * * *

With all a boy's abandonment
I loved her then, this Heaven-sent
Interpreter of all the moods
And womanly beatitudes.
I loved her graceful ways and each
Delicious little trick of speech
That marked her dearer than the rest,
But O! my heart was happiest
In this, which in that heart I knew:
That she was wholly sweet and true. * * *
I mourn for her, but are these tears
Not also for the buried years?
And for the thought that with her dies
Another of the crumbling ties
Between me and my happy youth?
Ah, yes, I know it, and the truth
Makes sudden riot in the heart,
Where once she queened it with her art.

YESTERDAY'S RAIN

A SUNDAY misty and wet
Moves us to chafe and complain,
Robbed of our outing, and yet
Came there in yesterday's rain—
Light as the spray of the sea,
Soft as the dropping of dew—
So many blessings to me,
Surely you noticed them, too.

Windows fronting the East
Bare of shutter and pane,
Took, as the light increased,
Silver driftings of rain.
Slowly the moisture crept
Over my pillow and bed
Drowning the dream I'd kept
Warm in my drowsy head. * * * .

There to me came, as I lay,
Out of the neighboring woods
Waking sounds of the day,
Calls of the solitudes;
Thrushes caroling near,
Church-bells over the hill,
The whine of the housedog here
Under my window-sill—

YESTERDAY'S RAIN

But over and through it all
The liquid laughter of leaves
Glad for the gifts that fall
Over the world's wide eaves,
Glad for the cleansing rain,
Drenching branches and sod,
Suckling the ripening grain,
Plumping beans in the pod. * * *

Possibly, so I thought,
These are the tears of the bless'd
Shed for a world distraught
By hatreds and wild unrest;
This is a holy rain
Cleansing the blood-stained sod,
Bringing to earth again
Peace and the smile of God. * * *

Call it a mood if you will,
Call it my fancy alone;
That may account for it; still,
Possibly others may own
Share in this little refrain,
Share in the blessings I drew
Out of the mist and the rain.
Surely, you noticed them, too.

BALLADE OF THE SEA

MARK and chart my midmost foam;
Catch and hold my spindrift's snow.
Is there under God's wide dome
Anything doth freer go
Than my pulsing to and fro?
Save for the eternal One,
Unto whom my all I owe,
Lord or mistress have I none.

All the grandeur that was Rome
Barely set my face aglow;
Earth it won and made its home;
But my waves, unbridled so,
Over buried cities flow.
Save for the eternal One,
Unto whom my all I owe,
Lord or mistress have I none.

Spanish Philip's vaunt the gloom
Of my coral depths below
Holds in age-forgotten doom.
Me may other braggarts know
Their most sure and potent foe.
Save for the eternal One,
Unto whom my all I owe,
Lord or mistress have I none.

BALLADE OF THE SEA

L'ENVOI

Prince, thy pride may get thee woe!
Save for the eternal One,
Unto whom my all I owe,
Lord or mistress have I none.

THE SONG OF THE MARCH WIND

I AM the minstrel, the maker of mirth,
And the forest my harp is:
From the fibres asleep in the heart of the earth,
Where its woof and its warp is,
I fashion the spring
With the song that I sing!

I, that am breathed of the mouth of my God,
Am His music in motion;
And His breath on my wings shakes the slumbering sod
And the floor of the ocean;
And I fashion the spring
With the song that I sing!

I am the breath of your nostrils, O man!
And akin to your spirit;
But our God's voice was mine ere your singing began,
So rejoice when you hear it;
For I bring you the spring
With the song that I sing!

FLAG O' MY LAND

UP to the breeze of the morning I fling you,
Blending your folds with the dawn in the sky;
There let the people behold you, and bring you
Love and devotion that never shall die.
Proudly, agaze at your glory, I stand,
Flag o' my land! flag o' my land!

Standard most glorious! banner of beauty!
Whither you beckon me there will I go,
Only to you, after God, is my duty;
Unto no other allegiance I owe.
Heart of me, soul of me, yours to command,
Flag o' my land! flag o' my land!

Pine to palmetto and ocean to ocean,
Though of strange nations we get our increase,
Here are your worshipers one in devotion,
Whether the bugles blow battle or peace.
Take us and make us your patriot band,
Flag o' my land! flag o' my land!

Now to the breeze of the morning I give you—
Ah! but the days when the staff will be bare!
Teach us to see you and love you and live you
When the light fades and your folds are not there.
Dwell in the hearts that are yours to command,
Flag o' my land! flag o' my land!

THEY come into the parlor car
And take their seats beside me.
How very commonplace they are!
I know my wife would chide me,
And call it rude of me to stare
At this old man and woman,
But, since they do not seem to care,
Why shouldn't I be human?
I've read my paper through and through—
There's mighty little in it—
And so I've nothing else to do
But watch them for a minute.
They offer little promise, though,
Of charm to the beholder;
I judge her sixty-five or so,
And he a trifle older. * * *

I've watched them for a hundred miles!
I'd watch another hundred,
To share the paradise that smiles
Around them! How I blundered,
To call this couple commonplace.
Youth's glory and Romance's
Play sunnily about each face
And glimmer in their glances.
His heart, a bee above the flower,
Around her form is flitting,
And she—how well she knows her power!—
She snares it in her knitting.

DARBY AND JOAN

Here's Love that is forever new,
That feasts and still doth hunger—
Ah! he's eternal twenty-two
And she a trifle younger.

Let my love, Lord, for my mate grow
Thus god-like, to enfold her,
When she is three-score-ten or so,
And I a trifle older.

THE VILLAGE POET

WHENEVER it's a Saturday—oh, long before the dew
Is drunken by the golden sun that climbs the cloudless blue,
Almost before the nested birds have started in to stir,
I rise an hour earlier and take a walk with HER.

I wonder if you realize the joy—and joy to spare—
The May-time morning carries in its lilac-laden air;
I wonder if you know what lyric breezes are about
To take the trees and shake their lovely leafy banners out,
To fill the winds with music and to blow a vagrant tress
Across your cheek, that burns at such unwonted wantonness.
Of course you cannot know all this. You would, though, if
you were
To rise an hour earlier and take a walk with HER.

I wonder if you know what joys, when morning's gates unlock,
The winds of May blow round the world 'twixt dawn and six
o'clock.

I wonder that with droning nose above your blanket's hem
You lie there in the growing light, oblivious to them.
How can you be a slug-a-bed and soak yourself in sleep
When there are in the dewy dells sweet trystings you might
keep?

Oh! If you'd know the sweetest joy of all that ever were
You'd rise an hour earlier and take a walk with HER.

That's why when it's a Saturday—oh, long before the dew
Is drunken by the golden sun that climbs the cloudless blue,
Almost before the nested birds have started in to stir,
I rise an hour earlier and take a walk with HER.

PERCHED on a soapbox in the crowd,
Tearful, jubilant, humbled, proud,
Pierced by the music of fifes and drums,
Dazed by the roar when the vanguard comes,
 One of the thousands, She!
Ah! but the hunger of soul that lies
Crouched in the mist of her shining eyes
Leaps at the serried ranks that pass,
Striving to pick from the marching mass
 Smith of Company B.

Private Smith, with his head in air,
Chest well up and shoulders square,
Thrills to the shouting, down the line,
Turning the blood in his veins to wine—
 One of the thousands, She!
Myriad faces, blurred, he sees,
Hears the pennons snap in the breeze;
Hope of fame, pure love of the game,
Joy in the feel of his rifle, claim
 Smith of Company B.

Cheers, for the Courage that's yet to prove,
Lustier ring than the lisp of Love.
Oh! but the shouts of the crowd are sweet!
Many the worshipers here in the street—
 One of the thousands, She!

* * * * *

SMITH OF COMPANY B

Woman, rose of the world, and goal
Set for the homing soldier's soul,
Give him now to his hope of fame!
Let the joy in his rifle claim
 Smith of Company B.

IN LOCKERBIE STREET

James Whitcomb Riley, the poet, died late on Saturday night, July 22, 1916, at his home in Lockerbie Street, Indianapolis.

IN the quaint little street, far from noise of the town,
Soft as petals of roses the Sabbaths come down,
But never before have those whispering trees
Taken Sabbath like this from the dawn-risen breeze;
Sorrow's self lays a finger to lip when they meet,
For there's crape on a doorbell in Lockerbie street.

And the sun that was wont, for this many a year,
To peep into a window flung wide to its cheer,
Finds the casement close-shuttered and blank as the walls;
And the gold of the morning dejectedly falls
On the streamer of gloom and of mortal defeat,
For there's crape on a doorbell in Lockerbie street.

Ah! the dear, tender spirit, so gentle and mild,
That had given but joy to the heart of the child,
Here at last wrings the tears from the innocent eyes:
For each fond little neighbor's awed glance of surprise
Melts to grief for the friend whom no more he shall meet—
For there's crape on a doorbell in Lockerbie street.

Ah! but Lockerbie street, you are fixed and secure
And for ages of sunshine your name shall endure.
Through you shall come shining the joy of the morn,
And music to cheer generations unborn,
For the song of the singer Death cannot defeat,
Though there's crape on a doorbell in Lockerbie street.

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